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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7153
INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 17073

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SUBJECT: ESCAPE OF THREE ISLAMIC JIHAD MEMBERS FROM
PRISON

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. THREE MEMBERS OF THE ISLAMIC JIHAD ORGANIZATION JAILED SINCE THE AFTERMATH OF THE OCTOBER 1981 ASSASSINATION OF SADAT ESCAPED JULY 17. THEY OVERPOWERED TWO GUARDS, STOLE THEIR WEAPONS AND ESCAPED ON MAKESHIFT ROPE LADDERS, SPARKING RUMORS THAT THEY HAD BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE. THOSE SUSPECTED OF LINKS WITH ISLAMIC JIHAD ARE BEING ROUNDED UP FOR QUESTIONING, AND AN ENRAGED ZAKI BADR HAS SACKED A NUMBER OF HIS OFFICERS. HOWEVER, WE ARE ALSO HEARING GRUMBLINGS THAT THE INTERIOR MINISTER'S POLICY OF SUMMARY TRANSFERS AND OTHER PUNISHMENTS FOR MINOR INFRACTIONS HAS CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE OF TIMIDITY IN WHICH OPERATIONS SUCH AS THIS ESCAPE ARE EASIER TO PULL OFF. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) THREE MEMBERS OF THE ISLAMIC JIHAD ORGANIZATION WHO WERE IMPLICATED IN THE ASSASSINATION OF ANWAR SADAT IN OCTOBER 1981 ESCAPED FROM THE MAXIMUM SECURITY AL TORAH PRISON IN CAIRO BEFORE DAWN JULY 17. SECURITY FORCES SNARLED RUSH HOUR TRAFFIC IN A FRUITLESS SEARCH FOR THE ESCAPEES, BUT REFRAINED FROM ANY ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PRISON BREAK UNTIL LATE AFTERNOON. A BRIEF INTERIOR MINISTRY STATEMENT SAID THAT A SUBSTANTIAL REWARD WOULD BE OFFERED FOR THEIR CAPTURE. THE THREE WERE IDENTIFIED AS KHAMIS MOHAMMED MOSSLAM, MOHAMMED MAHMOUD EL-ASWANI, AND ESAMEDDIN EL-KAMARI.

¶3. (C) AN EMBASSY SOURCE WITH EXCELLENT CONTACTS IN THE SECURITY FORCES SAID THAT THE THREE APPARENTLY ESCAPED ABOUT FIVE AM ON JULY 17, BUT THEIR ABSENCE WAS NOT DETECTED UNTIL A ROLL CALL SEVERAL HOURS LATER. THE THREE WERE HOUSED IN A SINGLE CELL FROM WHICH THEY ESCAPED BY PULLING OUT AN AIR VENT AND THEN OVERPOWERING A GUARD. THEY TOOK HIS WEAPON AND MADE THEIR WAY TO THE PRISON WALLS WHERE THEY OVERCAME A SECOND GUARD IN THE WATCHTOWER AND THEN WENT OVER THE WALL USING IMPROVISED ROPE LADDERS. CONTRARY TO PRESS REPORTS, OUR SOURCE SAID THAT NO SHOTS WERE FIRED, BUT BOTH GUARDS WERE BADLY INJURED. THE ESCAPEES MADE OFF WITH THEIR SEMI-AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AND SOME 200 ROUNDS OF AMMUNITION.

¶4. (C) OUR SOURCE DESCRIBED EL-KAMARI AS BY FAR THE MOST DANGEROUS OF THE THREE. HE IS A FORMER MAJOR IN THE ARMY'S ELITE RANGER BATTALION AND HAS A REPUTATION FOR INTELLIGENCE AND RUTHLESSNESS. HE IS BELIEVED TO BE THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF ISLAMIC JIHAD'S "MILITARY" WING, BUT SINCE THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE LINKING HIM DIRECTLY WITH SADAT'S ASSASSINATION, HE WAS NOT GIVEN THE DEATH PENALTY. MOSSLAM AND ASWANI WERE CHARGED WITH THE MURDER OF A POLICE OFFICER IN 1981. OUR SOURCE SAID THE FACT THAT THEY HAD BEEN HANDLED VERY HARSHLY BY AUTHORITIES AFTER THEIR ARREST HAS CONVINCED SECURITY FORCES THAT IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO RECAPTURE THEM WITHOUT A BATTLE. IN AN EFFORT TO TRACE THE ESCAPEES, A ROUNDUP OF INDIVIDUALS KNOWN OR BELIEVED TO HAVE

CONTACTS/SYMPATHIES WITH ISLAMIC JIHAD HAS ALREADY
BEGUN, AS HAS THE INTERROGATION OF A JIHADIST STILL IN
AL TORAH PRISON.

15. (C) THE ESCAPE OF THE THREE WILL BE A MAJOR
EMBARRASSMENT TO INTERIOR MINISTER ZAKI BADR AFTER A
PUBLICIZED STRING OF SUCCESSES AGAINST TERRORIST
GROUPS. HE MOVED IMMEDIATELY TO CASHIER THE HEAD OF
THE PRISONS DEPARTMENT, AND OUR SECURITY SOURCE SAID
THAT OVER TWO DOZEN OTHER OFFICERS HAVE BEEN CALLED IN
FOR QUESTIONING OR SUSPENDED FROM THEIR DUTIES. THE
APPARENT EASE OF THE ESCAPE HAS ALREADY SPARKED RUMORS
THAT THE THREE HAD ASSISTANCE FROM BOTH INSIDE AND
OUTSIDE THE PRISON. OUR SOURCE ADDED THAT MANY OF HIS
CONTACTS, ALREADY DEMORALIZED BY THE INTERIOR
MINISTER'S AUTOCRATIC AND INTIMIDATING WAYS, ARE
GRUMBLING THAT HIS POLICIES OF PUNISHMENT AND SUMMARY
TRANSFER FOR THE SLIGHTEST INFRACTION HAVE CREATED AN
ATMOSPHERE OF TIMIDITY AND DISCONTINUITY THAT HAMPERS
THE EFFICIENCY OF THE SECURITY SERVICES.

WISNER